

Influential Factors in the Choice of a Nursing Education Career

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Introduction

Recent studies suggest that half of the nation's 32,000 nurse faculty expect to retire within the next ten years and 21% expect to retire within the next 5 years (Kaufman, 2007). Additionally, in 2006 approximately 35% of all budgeted, full-time nursing faculty positions were unfilled (Charting, 2007). This looming shortage of faculty is occurring simultaneously as the demand for nurses grows: the federal Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) predicts the nation's nursing shortage could exceed more than one million registered nurses by 2020 (Biviano et al, 2004). Yet, in the 2005-2006 academic year, one out of every three qualified applicants or a total of 88,000 potential RNs were turned away from schools of nursing (NLN, 2008) across the United States.

North Carolina also faces a predicted shortage of 32,000 RNs by 2020 (NCCN, 2006). Yet, here too, qualified applicants are being turned away from RN entry-level nursing programs: 7,066 in 2007 (NCCN, 2008) and 6,588 in 2006 (NCCN, 2007). This trend continues to occur in spite of the fact that graduations from RN entry-level programs have increased by 28% over 2003 levels. Records indicate that, since 2003, each year about half of all qualified applicants to RN education programs are denied admission. A study of resource capacity and infrastructure needs in state nursing education programs, conducted as part of the North Carolina Institute of Medicine Task Force on the Nursing Workforce (NCIOM, 2004) found the primary reason was an insufficient budget to add the necessary faculty, as well as insufficient classroom space and clinical sites (NCCN, 2003).

This study attempts to identify the factors that 'pull' RNs into the role of nurse educator in an academic setting, and those that 'push' RNs away from that role. Three related groups were included in order to assess these influential factors from a variety of view points: current nurse educators (both classroom and clinical), ex-nurse educators who have left the role within the past 5 years, and RNs with advanced degrees that are qualified to become nurse educators but have never been in that role. Once identified, these "push" and "pull" factors will be used to craft an evidence-based strategy for improving the role of nurse educator in our state and for increasing the number of RNs willing to serve in that role.

Literature Review

A review of the literature focused on all types of faculty in higher education found that people are attracted to the autonomy of the faculty role, the ability to make a difference, being able to pursue personal research interests, and working with interesting people (Lindholm, 2004). Most faculty also enjoy the stimulating and challenging environment of the college setting and the idea of teaching students. For some individuals, teaching just seemed a natural ability, their "calling" (Lindholm, 2006). Peterson and Wisenberg (2006) found their study participants had an attraction to the faculty lifestyle and liked the challenge of contributing to their professional field. Both of these studies learned that early childhood influences were important, in addition to encouragement from faculty or advisors when they were students. Being located close to their home, the positive reputation of the university (Lindholm, 2004) and the availability of a job (Peterson & Wisenberg, 2006; Fugate & Amey, 2000) were also factors. A study of community college faculty found that the faculty had not